

Once again Ed Hertel is moving long time wrongfully attributed chips to their rightful place in history.

This week's Illegal of the Day is the second to put the Eastside Club chips in their rightful place. Last time he took the Jones mold "East Side" (2 words) chips out of Biloxi and placed them into Mississippi's Rankin County Gold Coast.

<http://www.thechipboard.com/index.cgi/page/1/md/read/id/1269587/sbj/illegal-of-the-day-mississippi-3/>

Take it away Ed.

This week we will turn our attention to the Mason hub mold "Eastside" (1 word) chips.

As mentioned last time, we found no evidence that an Eastside Club ever existed in Biloxi. To compound the problem, the below chips have not been found with other Mississippi chips. So where to begin?

My note: I said that I had the East Side chips listed as Biloxi. I've also had the Eastside chips listed as Biloxi since 1999. I could have sent for the Mason records back then but I took the word of other collectors especially the Mississippi expert I got them from at the time. Trust but "Verify" should have been applied on this one. <g>



Eastside TX1

Jack Darby

Fort Worth, TX

1950

7000 chips

My note: I need the black hub. Cough it up if you have a trader.

Luckily, with some digging, I was able to find someone who had pulled the Mason mold identification years ago, but never followed up on it. What I found was both surprising and extremely exciting. These chips were not from a small unknown club on the Gulf coast, but from an important club right in the middle of the Benny Binion gambling wars in Dallas, Texas.

The Mason records from 1950 only say "Jack Darby, Fort Worth, Texas". That was surely all any postman needed in 1950 to make the delivery and that is all we would need to be able to place these chips in a club.

Before we dive into the Eastside, we need a short rundown of where we stand. There have been a few IOTD in the past talking about characters in the Dallas Gambling Wars, and it's far too intriguing and complex for me to do it any justice in one IOTD here. I encourage anyone interested in learning the entire story to pick up the book "I'll Do My Own Damn Killin" by Gary Sleeper. It goes in depth about all the activity in this bloody war.

Late in the 1930s, part-time cowboy and full-time gambler Benny Binion took control of Dallas gambling through partnerships and the conveniently timed elimination of gambling rivals. Hotels all around town were either hosting one of Benny's craps games, or someone who was paying Benny his customary 25% from their own game. Rivalry in town was at a minimum and there seemed to be plenty to go around. As long as everyone knew their place, and Binion received his fair share, there would be peace. But, as like most stories that start out this way, it would not last. Eventually, someone would think they deserved more, and in Dallas, this person was Hebert Noble.

Benny had helped start Noble's gambling empire by financing his early games and giving him profitable locations. It is suspected that this was payback for Noble helping Benny in eliminating Binion's biggest policy rival (see the IOTD Texas on Sam Murray.

<http://www.marlowcasinochips.com/links/genetrimble/illegaloftheday/SantaPaulaTX.pdf>).

However it started, it didn't take long before Noble outgrew his benefactor and decided he could make it himself. What started out as an annoyance turned serious when Noble split off into his own games and helped elect a new sheriff who was outwardly hostile to Binion. Enough was enough and over the next decade Noble would be a hunted man. He was to survive over a dozen assassination attempts which prompted the newspapers to nickname him "The Cat" for the number of lives he had. Unfortunately, this spurred a war which took many lives, including Herbert Noble's wife when she was blown up with a car bomb meant for him.

During this time, the gambling empires of both men spilled into neighboring Fort Worth which had relaxed its rules against "friendly vices" such as gambling and soft bootlegging. If a gentleman wanted a drink or shoot some dice, he didn't have to take his business to Dallas. Fort Worth would give the same services, but they would be run by locals, thus avoiding all the violence seen in Dallas. This was of course a pipe dream that would never work and both Binion and Noble were silent partners in most of Fort Worth's gambling action.

It is in the intercity gambling war that we find our club in question. The Eastside Club would be pivotal in Benny Binion's control over his Fort Worth interests. It was located in Fort Worth's eastern suburbs in a town called Halton City, giving it a position of acting as a buffer between his two city interests.



Eastside TX2

At the head of the Eastside Club, Benny had his most trusted and one of his oldest friends, George Wilderspin. If you asked him, George preferred to be considered a cattleman and his passion definitely lay on the plains outside of town. He spent the early part of his life on the rodeo circuit and held various calf roping titles for years. It was his skills which first got him in trouble when on vacation in Yellowstone National Park he was arrested after being caught trick roping a bear. It would be the first and only time he would spend a night in jail.

George would later meet up with a cowboy named Benny Binion and they immediately hit up a friendship which would last a lifetime. George was a frequent visitor of Binion at his Montana ranch and word soon got around Fort Worth that if you wanted to talk to Binion, you first had to set it up with Wilderspin.

Picture of a mature George Wilderspin:



Eastside TX3

When Binion wanted to move into Fort Worth, he knew he needed people he could trust and went to his friend and asked him to open a club. George Wilderspin would later admit that he was weary of getting involved in the illegal business of gambling and so, wanting to make sure he had his T's crossed, he set up a meeting with the county sheriff's office. Wilderspin needed assurances that he would be safe and a deal was struck for a weekly payoff. In an interview before his death, George said he warned the office that if he was ever to be arrested that he would not be the only one going down. It was a warning they would be smart to heed.

All the paths were clear for Wilderspin to get started except for one important thing... he had no idea how to run a casino. He even went so far as to claim to not know how to play craps. This would be no problem however as Binion had plenty of able bodied people and sent in an associate named Jack Darby.

Jack Darby had been with the syndicate for some time and had started off as a partner with Hebert Noble in some of his hotel craps games, which were backed by Binion's money. When war broke out between the two big men, Jack Darby needed to pick a side, and pick he did.

On 19 August 1946, Darby would take a shot at the \$15,000 bounty on Noble's head. On the pretense of a gambling payoff, Darby gave his friend a call and asked him to meet at the Biltmore Recreation Room in Dallas. When Hebert Noble showed up, Darby pulled a gun and marched Noble into the upstairs offices where they met Eddie Gilliland, owner of the club. It was Darby's intention to goat Noble into going for his gun so his assassination could be a witnessed self-defense. As Darby spat profanities at Noble, begging him to draw his gun, Noble sat silent. He knew his old friend didn't have the heart and after a few hours, Noble calmly talked his old friend down from killing him. Hebert "The Cat" Noble had not yet run out of lives. The two men agreed to part ways and leave each other alone. (This pact however did not extend to the third man in the room and two months later Gilliland was found dead.)

I'm not sure what excuse Jack gave to Binion, but it must have been good as he later looked to Darby for help with the Eastside Club.

Fort Worth's attempt to stay out of the Dallas-type violence was never going to work. Two factions developed, one with Binion at the helm (including Wilderspin, among others) and the other by a front man named Nelson Harris (and backed by Hebert Noble). These factions clashed dramatically in 1950 when Nelson's car exploded, taking both his and his nine-month-pregnant wife's lives. The national publicity of this event outraged state officials and citizens alike and prompted an investigation which was helped along by the list of city official's names found in Nelson's wreckage. The scrutiny turned up the heat and uncovered rampant gambling and underworld dealings.

The result of the investigation came in March 1951 with the indictment of sixty gamblers, including both Wilderspin and Darby.

Tarrant County Probers Return 60 Indictments

FORT WORTH, March 31.—(AP)—Sixty gambling indictments were returned by a Tarrant county grand jury that warned its investigation was by no means complete.

In a biting report Friday, the grand jury returned the indictments and lashed at some public officials it said had been grossly derelict of duty.

Charges Vary.

The indictments — naming some of the county's top gamblers—ranged from keeping and exhibiting a gaming table and bank to permitting a place under the charged person's control to be used for gaming.

Attorneys immediately began arranging for bonds for the men charged.

The grand jury also returned several other indictments. Three named Chief Deputy Sheriff A. B. Career as having demanded illegal fees "involving alleged illegal charging for transportation of patients to the Wichita Falls state hospital."

Deputy to Stay.

Carter, a former Tarrant county sheriff, said he intends to "stay on the job" as chief deputy to Sheriff Sully Montgomery.

The jury's probe was initiated late in January after the Fort Worth Star-Telegram unearthed documents found among the personal papers of slain gambler Nelson Harris.

The papers listed names with numbers written beside them.

Those under gambling indictments included:

Fred Browning of Top of the Hill; Bert Wakefield, 3939 Club; W. D. Satterwhite, Skyline Club Annex; W. C. Kirkwood, 2222 Restaurant; Les Hutt, 3939; Oscar Donley, Top of the Hill; Phil Long, 3939.

George Wilderspin, operator of the East Side Club in Haltom City; Tiffin Hall, hotel and cafe operator; Pete Ford, H. D. Oden, A. R. Floyd, Jack Darby, William Jordan, Paul Garland, Dewey Inman, Tom Daly, Al Clark, Billy Hughes, L. J. McWillie and Howard Lee.

Also named were four coin machine operators, Roy Moore, Bennie McDonald, Les Moore and Jack Frankrich.

Most were multiple count indictments with five to seven charges apiece.

Eastside TX4

Wilderspin though, had an ace up his sleeve. He called for a closed meeting with the district attorney's office and two days later the felony charges were reduced to misdemeanors (much to the displeasure of the shocked grand jury) and the club owners gladly paid their \$1000 fines and left. The official story was that there wasn't enough evidence to prosecute. Wilderspin would later claim that the real reason was his threat of exposing the payoffs from the bottom to the top. Although he had been assured the trial would be just for show and he wouldn't be convicted, Wilderspin wouldn't have any of it. If it went to trial, he would sing. The district attorney's office did the only thing they could and essentially dropped the charges.

This seemed to be the final straw for George Wilderspin, who never had much love for the casino business. His friend Benny Binion was now living full time in Las Vegas and wasn't paying as much attention to his Texas empire. George left the Eastside Club and went back into horse trading.

Jack Darby continued in the gambling business and saw the end of organized widespread gambling in Dallas. In August 1951, Hebert Noble's luck ran out as a well-placed bomb in his mailbox finally killed him. Benny Binion would have a bit of bad luck himself as the IRS closed in and eventually sentenced him to four years in prison. When he emerged in 1957, the Dallas gambling scene was over. The era that had once been was now done.

Darby must have got some stuff from Taylor too (not aware of any chip orders); Kefauver's Taylor customer list:

East Side Club
5126 Bolknap St.
Ft. Worth, Texas
(Jack Darby)

My note:



EastsideTX1

Ed asked me to address the hot stamps on the chips. Appears to be the same exact hot stamp from 2 different distributors. Hubs are from the Mason Company in Chicago. Rectangle Heart was distributed by Code & Company in Chicago and several others including HC Edwards, and Bazaar Supply/Berk Trading Co., Yonkers, NY over the years.

There are standard font dies and "Special Dies." IMO the Eastside is a Special Die. Either way the distributor charged a die charge. Special Dies belonged to the customer. Sometimes distributors will send the Special Die to the customer after the run and sometimes they would just hold them. I have had several returned to me over the years. I could send them to another distributor for a reorder if I wanted to.

I do not know which company made the 1st Eastside order. I do know the old distributors worked with each other on dies. Example: Several Taylor records on Preserving History have notes saying they are using E. M. O'Neil, Mason, or Hunt dies for a reorder. They took the order, borrowed the original die, and still charged the customer a die charge. <g>

Illegal chip collectors love their chips but we want them rightly attributed. This is the 3rd "Illegal Of The Day" post in a row (East Side, Owl on a branch, and Eastside) repairing past mistakes for the history of our chips. We can now say "Rest Easy" friends. <g>

Thank you Ed Hertel.